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A3 Soph. Honors English

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Unit 22 – The “Lucky Man”

After I finally quit trying to get some sleep, something finally appeared across the view. It was some kind of gate. There seemed to be empty spaces between the wood, lined across as far as I could see. As we approached, I realized that it was not a gate of wood, but of people. My new view now was only thousands of brown eyes watching me. The only thing separating us - a wall of barbed wire. As we pulled to a stop in front of the human chain, my eyes looked back to see the only thing that was actually made of wood. A sign: Manzanar War Relocation Center. We had arrived.

“Alright, everyone up,” ranted the tall, middle-aged man. His proud smile almost outshined the newly-polished badge he wore, “Now, as you can see we have arrived at the Manzanar Camp, currently housing approximately 10,000 Japs. Your job is obviously very important here; we wouldn’t want no enemies and yellow little fingers planning another attack on us would we?”

As he continued his rant about America’s glory and the terrible fault of Japan, I began to take in my surroundings. The dust had managed to creep onto our luggage already and it looked like it wouldn’t be getting much better once we exited the overloaded bus. The guards around me seemed to be about my age, but wore much more confident smiles as they nodded in agreement to the over-confident man’s speech. I tried to recognize any faces, hoping one of the soldier’s in my past unit would be here. As I began to recall the reason for our department, President Franklin Roosevelt’s words from February came back into my head. 9066. Executive order 9066. Along with the number, my friend’s somber face reappeared, his normal smile long gone. But Roosevelt’s voice was replaced with some more barking.

“Guard. You. Yes, you with the already homesick face,” barked the man, who had apparently decided to end his speech early. “We are now entering the camp. Pay attention, or go join the filthy black-haired sinners.”

“Sorry, I -,” I tried to begin.

“I don’t want any apology from nobody except for from the little prisoners waiting outside,” smirked the man, receiving chuckles of approval from the rest of the bus.

I quickly looked away and picked up my only bag, which was now covered in a layer of brown dust powder. Without making eye contact with anyone else, I jumped down the stairs, and hurriedly exited the nationalistic bus. But my mouth slightly opened once again as I looked up from the crumbly ground, whose appearance matched my bags. The end-of-fall November heat didn’t feel as bad as I had heard on the ride here, but everything was much worse. I could not stop looking at the endless small tags attached to the “gate” I had first spotted during our arrival. I wasn’t dealing with humans. I was dealing with people who had become mere numbers.

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“Alright men, let’s get moving,” announced the general, still polishing his beloved badge. “Your duties as men of this country start today. Guarding these Japs is no duty to overlook so easily. Follow your tower leader and live up to my expectations.”

I forced myself to cast my glare elsewhere as I followed my leader to exit the crowded dining hall. I had not set foot outside since our grand entrance yesterday, but the view had not changed much. The long, identical barracks stood in the summer sun as far as I could see, with the only distinguishing factor being the different faces that entered and exited the dim boxes. As the others began to enter the desolate prison that housed over 10,000, I heard the strong winds speak up again and was greeted by a vile stench.

“God that smells like shit,” I muttered, now disgusted by not only the people I roomed with.

The older man next to me chuckled, “Ay, you’ll get use to it. The sewage plant is just round there. It’ll smell like home in a few days. Just think you’re lucky they called ya in after they put some of that linoleum in them floors. God it was work always tryin’ to rid the dust by puttin’ them tin cans over the holes on the ground.”

I slightly nodded in agreement as my eyes continued to scan the bland landscape. It was only dawn and already men, women, and children had started working the endless fields. Despite the distracting gusts and smells, Roosevelt’s cold voice would not stop creeping into my head. I forced myself to believe that there was no way Kichirou could be here. I “believed” he was back in Japan. Tending his family problems that he had provided for the reason of his departure. As they opened the barbed wire gate, I walked up the creaky wooden steps to the top of the tower. And just like that I had entered a game. The land before me had transformed into a board. I counted 36 blocks that housed 14 dimly-lit boxes per block. Despite the few black dots moving through the long paths, the board looked foreign and abandoned. I wish it had been foreign. I wish I could have abandoned it.

“Mama’s boy, pay attention,” ordered the general, “The japs will be coming back to eat breakfast soon, so actually focus for once will you.”

I learned not to reply, and just bobbed my head, shaking all the dust off my helmet. I wondered if any other guards thought it was a bit much to be wearing full on gear with helmets when supervising a prison that was made up of a majority of children and overall people who were weaponless and had not committed any federal crimes. But with my past experience serving, I knew questions regarding missions were not so kindly viewed.

“Alright, they’re coming in! Keep your eyes open, no one will be escaping under my watch,” bellowed the general.

As the wire moved open, my bland game board began to move. Thousands of little dots began concentrating towards us and into the slightly bigger boxes - mess halls. It reminded me of a colony of ants, all the same - moving to the same place. The lively children walking by managed to crack the first small smile that my face had worn since my arrival. But remembering the shiny badge and the smirking face behind it, my eyes returned heartless for good.

“‘Kay, they’re all back, I see no yellow outside. Close the gates.”

The younger guard who had sat across from me on the long ride here began to entrap us within the wire once again. As he firmly secured the gate under watchful eyes, I followed my leader back down the creaky steps, and back onto the once again, barren camp. We passed the long boxes, now empty, and headed towards the mess halls to fill our stomachs as well.

As soon as I stepped in, I was hit by an unpleasant hygienic smell mixed with mass produced stew. But the stench became unnoticeable as I began to take in my new view, that was for once, not a deserted dust bowl. Hundreds of black heads filled the rows of picnic tables throughout the whole hall. Finally, I could draw faces to the small dots on my board game. The many tan faces, due to working under the intense California sun, were still hard to differentiate, but seemed much more alive than they had from the tower. With the prisoners only having a scarce amount of clothing, even the hall seemed made of dust. As my ears were filled with a mix of foreign and identifiable words, I grabbed a tray but did not break my gaze this time. *There was no way I had possibly seen him, right? They all look the same, right? There are over 10,000 of them, right? He’s in Japan...right?* While trying to observe the “temporary” residents of the camp and distinguish my possible ex-soldier, I again failed to hear the general.

The younger guard poked me in the rib with his dusty metal tray. As I turned away from the foreign babbles and my temporary shock, I discovered myself face to face with the shiny badge. I looked up just in time to receive the most unpleasant view of all, the general.

“Mama’s boy, stop drooling over the Japs and listen. The only reason you should be approaching them is to spit onto their sorry little faces,” he snapped, as he grandly took my tray and sat at the table farthest from the prisoners.

The older man with the Southern speech handed me another tray and gave me a sincere and pitiful sorry smile. I accepted his act of friendship and proceeded to wait in line for “seconds.”

As I felt guilt in eating the hard-earned food the children and prisoners had worked to grow, my thoughts finally dropped the recognizable face and my eyes were drawn to the general. For once he was not in my face, but someone else’s.

“Get outta my way Jap. You’re gonna give me an apology right now for trying to knock my tray over,” yelled the general.

The unsurprised, young Japanese man kept his head by his chest and muttered a quick, “I’m sorry,” and hurried along.

The general continued to grumble about the stupidity of Japanese people and their terrible manners as I tried to get a better look at the accused man. He was the same one my eyes had picked out earlier. But he had quickly managed to mix back into the ocean of other prisoners by the time the rant had ended.

“”kay men, let’s get back to our tower,” instructed our leader.

As I followed him once again to put away my tray, I attempted to actually engage in the conversations around me.

I joined the older man, who now counted as my only “friend,” as he was watching the general with the other younger guard who had previously warned me during my, now regular, encounter with the general.

“I still think he’s moody about that Poston strike that happened a while back,” whispered the younger one.

I had never heard of a strike. Immediately, my ears were focused on their two voices.

My older friend replied, “Ay, that’s true mate. He was steamed from that. For once he was glarin’ at them Japs instead o’ polishin’ his little pride n’ joy.”

As I chuckled in my ability to perfectly envision the situation, they jumped a little and turned to find they had company. But once they realized it wasn’t the shiny badge, their eyes rapidly scanned the area, checking for any suspicion, and continued.

“You think there’ll be some kind of “strike” like that here? Do the prisoners even know that it happened?”

“I don’ know. But I sure think it could jus’ happen. I mean, if our Japs did hear ‘bout how successful them fellas at Poston were, what’s gon stop ‘em from tryin’ to do the same?”

I decided to speak. “So, did anything come out of the strike?”

I was given a quick response of two surprised faces looking over in my direction. I had forgotten how rare my engagement in conversations were. After a few seconds my friend remembered to reply.

“Ah, ye’ it was quite. Them Japs had demands wit their protests and they got em’ filled. It happen’ a beet before ya was called in. Was Novemba, I recall.”

“Ya, he’s right,” added the younger one, “General over there’s probably hoping it’s died down and gone for good, but who knows.”

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By the time I had learned about this strike by the people, I had arrived back to my desolate board game. But now it was more. Not only did the black little dots have faces, but they had feelings, and possibly, power.

“God it’s cold,” muttered the younger guard next to me, “I thought the summer heat was bad, but it’s only been five minutes and I can’t feel my fucking feet.”

Now that it was December, many of the prisoners were working indoors, which meant less work and more awkward silences for us. As I began to look over the empty game board that had turned from brown to white, I saw a small rectangular shape approaching the gates.

Nudging the younger guard who was blankly staring at one of the dimly lit boxes, I whispered into the silence, “What’s that over there. It’s coming our way.”

Finally shifting his view, he took a closer look, “That looks like another prisoner bus. I heard them talking about some more prisoners arriving. I guess that’s it.”

The slow bus had finally arrived at it’s fateful destination. Creaking to a stop, it halted in front of the gates just as we had two months ago. The only difference was there was no one to greet them, not even a human chain. The silence was finally broken when the doors snapped open and an unpleasantly familiar voice pierced the cold air.

“Alright all you Japs get out now. Grab what you have and follow me to your quarters. Stay in line, and if you can even understand me, I wouldn’t make any mistakes.”

As the general began to approach the gate, one by one, more little black dots trickled out of the bus, holding only what they could carry. Just like all of the other shipments of prisoners that had arrived, they lived up to the slightly dazed and still grieving expressions all the Japanese had carried entering. My gaze followed the general’s uptight body to the dimly lit boxes closest to our tower. He pounded on the door, and a young face immediately popped out, eyes avoiding contact. As they exchanged few words, with mostly the general spitting his orders, I looked closer at the nodding face. It was the same face that had avoided looking at the general that day we went into the mess hall for lunch and the general’s tray had been purposefully knocked over. I had seen that face last week as well, walking towards the communal bathrooms, which didn’t smell much better than the halls. But it wasn’t because I had seen his face three times that I found it familiar. *Kichirou - “Lucky Man.” My vision had not failed me. His family affairs. He had left to protect them. He. A man who had served our country - locked up in a cage by his fellow soldiers. Kichirou had risked his life for the men in our unit. He had been the first to accept me when I had failed the first round of testing. And here I was. Forcing the laws I disgusted upon the friend who trusted me for two years. Repaying him. What kind of game was this?*

As the new prisoners stood in line to be vaccinated, I continued to keep my watch over the dim box Kichirou apparently lived in. Out of the 500 some boxes that occupied the camp, it was interesting how he lived in the one closest to my tower, which also happened to be closest to the gate and freedom.

“Close-up in 5 minutes!” instructed our leader.

Since the snow had begun to come in on us hard, our shifts had minimized with the hours of light. Unlike when I had first arrived, children no longer played outside, and the board game somehow managed to look even barer. As I scanned the area for the last time, Kichirou’s small box in front of our tower seemed to stand out. Everyone else was asleep by now, but the single dim light bulb that hung over the 8-person room still had its glow. I wondered, what would they be doing at this hour? After lingering my eyes over the room for a few seconds longer, I just proceeded down the loud stairs and followed everyone else back to our quarters.

“This god damn snow is never going to stop at this rate. It’s only been what five days into the month and all I can see on myself everything else is white,” complained the younger guard, slouching his shoulders, “My feet are going to get frostbite, and then maybe the general with let me take a day off for once.”

The only visible figure moving in this hour was the delivery boy with the “Manzanar Free Press,” a newspaper run and read by the prisoners. As my eyes followed the small black dot, it seemed to be moving faster, with more energy, than the past weeks before. Compared to the most of us who slowly plundered our way through the snow, the dot seemed to be moving on a steady flow, finishing it’s route through the 500 acres in less than an hour.

“Well that kid can move his feet,” commented the complainer. I nodded in agreement as our eyes followed the small dot back to his origin, the mess hall.

After lunch, we gruesomely made our way back to the creaky steps, hoping for only six more hours of perfect posture before we could close the gate for good.

Turning to complain once more about the shitty weather, I opened my shivering mouth to speak, but instead left it gaping open in surprise. The empty white board had slowly started to spread with black dots. For the first time, all the hundreds of boxes were opened and thirty-some black dots trickled out of every door. Trapped in as much shock as I was, all the other straight bodies silently observed the phenomena. Then the single, sharp voice pierced through our heads again.

“Go get the camp police! What do those Japs think they’re doing?! Go for them Now! Do you frozen mutts not hear me?? Now!”

My older friend had been right. It was actually happening. Something more memorable than linoleum was entering the camp, something alive, something with power. Rebellion.

Although the general had yelled for the police minutes ago, it took them a good ten minutes to actually reach the rebels. But those short seconds had managed to be enough for the prepared fighters. The “papers” that had been delivered earlier that morning no longer advertised weekly recreational events and the next Bible study, but had transformed into signs. But the power of paper was always changing. While the prisoners’ lives were changed by the small signs that commanded them to report to camps, these papers of revolt would only hurt them more.

The prisoners’ shouts were slightly muffled by the arrival of the police. Like any other time they were needed, the officers were packed with weapons and gear that could easily diminish the number of black dots in the area. They proceeded to yell through their speakers about the illegality of this situation and the need for the Japs to stop. As the black dots persisted, the general barked at us to join the police. For the first time, we ran down the stairs and approached the over-loaded men. Being weaponless, we were instructed to approach the Japs and demand them to retreat. By the end of the day, our non-physical tactics had managed to force most of the dots back into their boxes. But many of the men were still managing to stand in the snow, refusing to surrender.

“‘Kay you guards can go back to your quarters now. I think they’ll either leave under our watch by dark, or freeze to death. I could care less,” said the policeman who had instructed us earlier.

Unlike every other morning, I was not woken by the piercing voice of the general. For the first time in three months, I woke up myself. *What if he had been one of the rebels. What would be of him now? I can’t let him die, he would risk his life for mine. I need to go out there and look for him. Help him. His box was one of the few that busted open. I can’t let him die. But I can’t go out there with everyone watching, right? The general would kill me, right? He’s suppose to be locked up...right? He’s just another Jap….right?* Somehow, the barking voice I had always been disgusted with managed to become mine. As the other guards began to stir and put on their helmets beside me, I remembered the previous day. Listening for any shouts or sound at all, I was only greeted by the sharp air and even more snow.

After our daily morning portion of soup, I prepared to follow my leader to our tower when the general instructed us to wait.

“They’re just cleanin’ up the little mess that was made because of them Japs. God, will they ever do anything right? The men are almost done there, but apparently they don’t want all you up and watching until nine, got it?”

Not wanting to lose our blessing of more indoor time, we stayed quiet and played cards. But the anxiety and guilt would not leave me. I assumed they were just cleaning up the signs and checking to make sure no one had escaped. I thought the numbers would stay the same. But again, what did I know - numbers seemed to hold power over humans.

As the gate opened I was greeted by not only miles of white, but some red as well. I tried to hide my horror as I saw a black dot entering his box with a dragging leg, poorly wrapped in cheap white bandaging. *No. No. It’s not supposed to be like this. This is a temporary home, not a battlefield. Kichirou! Where was he? He’s just back in his room, with all the others, right? My mouth opened to call for him, but was instantly shut as the barking voice again took over my head. I was powerless to this mind game.* As we walked towards the creaky steps, we passed two frozen bodies, awaiting removal. I tried to identify them, desperately wanting them to be unrecognizable strangers. *But for the first time in two years, we were reunited. I came face to face with my friend. The smile of a lucky man I remember his face to be was now silenced. His dead eyes were frozen open, staring straight into my empty eyes.*

The next day, trapped inside again due to severe blizzards, I tried to distract myself with stupid games but resorted to the “Manzanar Free Press.” I opened up a copy of the Jap paper that had managed to make its way onto our shabby table. Not forgetting the incident that had occurred only 24 hours ago, I was not shocked to see a memorial for the two men who would not be returning to their boxes. The two were not the only ones who had fought too long, ten other men were reported to have suffered severe injuries as well. Still desperately longing to see two foreign faces and new names, I read the English version of the segment.

“Kichirou, a 22 year old from Washington who also had served his time in the military recently as a soldier in Unit 22 was killed along with his older brother…”

Kichirou. Unit 22. Our unit. The soldier who had slept across from me for two years was now sleeping in his grave. The man I had once called my friend. The man who had claimed himself “lucky” to have met me. Dead. Was this the taste of betrayal? Honor and loyalty was lost in the inner objective of this game: murder. There was no such thing as winning. My board game had finally reached its end. My black dot had been pushed off the board.

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• Issei (Japanese immigrants) developed large closely knit family – that is why it was important for Kichirou to return home when the executive order was placed.

• Issei encouraged their children to leave home and the farming community – Kichirou left to serve for the army.

• This resulted in the formation of close relationships between the Nisei (2nd generation) and Americans – like between Kichirou and Robert (the narrator).

2. "Executive Order 9066." Human and Civil Rights: Essential Primary Sources. Ed. Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and K. Lee Lerner. Detroit: Gale, 2006. 153-156. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 6 Feb. 2015. <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2560000063&v=2.1&u=lake72770&it=r&p=GPS&sw=w&asid=7d604ef906361f3728bb9a2d58b65cfd>.

• Executive order 9066

• Brought sadness to Kichirou – forced him to leave the unit

• The reason why Kichirou and all the other prisoners were at Manzanar

• Issued by President Franklin Roosevelt

• Issued in February 1942

• Relocated families- Kichirou’s family - were allowed to stay together

• Camps were surrounded by guard towers and barbed wire

• Kichirou was forced to leave his job

3. "Internment History." PBS. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/>.

• Half of the prisoners at camps were children

• The camps were bleak and remote

• Some prisoners died in camp due to poor medical service

• Several prisoners (like the rebels and Kichirou) were killed for resisting/rebelling

4. "Japanese Americans at Manzanar." National Park Service. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Feb. 2015. <http://www.nps.gov/manz/historyculture/japanese-americans-at-manzanar.htm>.

• Prisoners established churches, groups, and clubs (like mentioned in the “Manzanar Free Press”)

• Prisoner run newspaper at Manzanar was called “Manzanar Free Press”

• Many prisoners were American citizens like Kichirou.

• There were both immigrant and second generation Japanese prisoners – reason for foreign babble heard at the mess hall.

• 500-acre housing section at Manzanar

• Camp was surrounded by barbed wire, guard towers, search lights, and police

• Outside the fence there was guard housing and sewage plants

• 5,500 acres of land – the majority – was used for agriculture and farming.

• By September 1942 there were more than 10,000 prisoners

• The 504 barracks were organized into 36 blocks.

• There were 14 barracks per block

• Eight people lived in a room

• The rooms had bare necessities – only one light bulb per room

• “Manzanar Riot” happened in December 1942

• 2 people were killed and 10 others were wounded in the riot

• 5,000 Japanese people were already serving in the U.S. military by December 1941 when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

• Prisoners had to work

• Most prisoners work in agriculture and farming

• There were doctors and nurses in the camps – who gave the vaccinations

• Families and prisoners were given identification numbers

• Prisoners were transported by bus, trucks, or trains

• Prisoners could only bring what they could carry.

• Summer temperatures at Manzanar went up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit – very hot

• Winter temperatures were below freezing

• There were strong winds all year long

• The wind covered the camp in dust

• Had to cover knotholes in ground with tin can lids in order to block the dust

• Linoleum was installed in late 1942 for the dust

5. Japanese internment camp at Manzanar." Photos/Illustrations. Library of Congress. American History. ABC-CLIO, 2015. Web. 6 Feb. 2015.

• Manzanar Relocation Center was the name of the camp

• It was one of the 10 internment camps

• The camp was open through 1942, it closed in November of 1945

6. "Japanese Internment Camp Locations." UWEC. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Feb. 2015. <http://people.uwec.edu/ivogeler/w188/j2.htm>.

• Most well-known camp was Manzanar – making it more likely that the narrator and Kichirou could have been at the same camp

7. "Japanese Internment Camps." UXL Encyclopedia of U.S. History. Sonia Benson, Daniel E. Brannen, Jr., and Rebecca Valentine. Vol. 4. Detroit: UXL, 2009. 810-814. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 30 Jan. 2015.

• 10,000 to 11,000 prisoners per camp

• Families and groups of people were assigned to barracks

• Everything was communal – dining (mess hall)

• Most prisoners were relocated from March to June 1942 – camp was mostly full by the time the narrator had arrived

• Prisoners were angry about losing their rights and freedoms – causing riots to break out

• Americans feared that the Japanese people would support Japan in the war – wanted to get rid of the Japanese

• Military leaders supported the internment camps

• Military leaders often commercialized the possibilities of Japanese sabotage

8. "Male Japanese Names." 2000 names from around the world. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2015. <http://www.20000-names.com/male\_japanese\_names.htm>.

• Kichirou – Japanese male name that means “lucky man”

9. "Not Exactly Paradise: Japanese American Internment Camps." Life on the Home Front. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/exhibits/ww2/threat/camps.htm>.

• Camps had poor weather and seasonal changes

• Camps were in desert locations with blistering hot summers and harshly cold winters

• In the blocks there were communal mess halls

• Area surrounding the camps was all used for farming

• Much of food in camp was produced by the prisoners and their farm work

10. "Poston (Colorado River)." Densho Encylopedia. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print.

• Poston Strike happened in November of 1942 – just before guard arrived

• Was most successful riot